

OBSERVATIONS OF RADIO GALAXY MRC 1138-262: MERGING GALAXIES EMBEDDED IN A GIANT Ly α HALO

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RESUMEN

El resumen será traducido al español por los editores. The radio galaxy MRC 1138-262 at $z = 2.16$ is most likely a brightest cluster galaxy in an early stage of evolution. Here we present observations of the luminous emission line halo and the stellar components of this radio galaxy. Optical narrow band imaging shows a very extended (~ 160 kpc) and luminous Ly α halo. Infrared narrow band imaging reveals a much smaller H α halo with a morphology very different from that of the Ly α halo. We advocate a model in which the inner part of the halo is photoionized by direct AGN illumination or by UV photons from young stars. Far from the nucleus (~ 25 kpc), there is a region of greatly enhanced Ly α emission. At this location, it is likely that shock ionization is important as indicated by a bend in the radio jet. Spectroscopy of several continuum clumps in the halo shows that, although there are striking differences between the emission and absorption features of the spectra of various regions, they have properties similar to those of Lyman-break galaxies. This is further evidence for a scenario in which massive galaxies form hierarchically from smaller building blocks.

ABSTRACT

The radio galaxy MRC 1138-262 at $z = 2.16$ is most likely a brightest cluster galaxy in an early stage of evolution. Here we present observations of the luminous emission line halo and the stellar components of this radio galaxy. Optical narrow band imaging shows a very extended (~ 160 kpc) and luminous Ly α halo. Infrared narrow band imaging reveals a much smaller H α halo with a morphology very different from that of the Ly α halo. We advocate a model in which the inner part of the halo is photoionized by direct AGN illumination or by UV photons from young stars. Far from the nucleus (~ 25 kpc), there is a region of greatly enhanced Ly α emission. At this location, it is likely that shock ionization is important as indicated by a bend in the radio jet. Spectroscopy of several continuum clumps in the halo shows that, although there are striking differences between the emission and absorption features of the spectra of various regions, they have properties similar to those of Lyman-break galaxies. This is further evidence for a scenario in which massive galaxies form hierarchically from smaller building blocks.

Key Words: GALAXIES: HALOS — GALAXIES: HIGH-REDSHIFT — GALAXIES: INDIVIDUAL (MRC 1138-262) — GALAXIES: JETS — INTERGALACTIC MEDIUM

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we present observations which were obtained as part of our campaign to search for clusters around high redshift radio galaxies (HzRGs). There are several indications (e.g. Pentericci et al. 1999) that powerful HzRGs tend to be in the center of forming clusters. MRC 1138-262 at redshift 2.16 is one of the best candidates for such a search. The indications for 1138-262 being at the center of a cluster include (a) the very clumpy morphology as

observed by the HST (Pentericci et al. 1998), reminiscent of model predictions for a massive merging system (Carlberg 1994); (b) the extremely distorted radio morphology and largest radio rotation measure (6200 rad m^{-2}) in a sample of more than 70 HzRGs, indicating that 1138-262 is surrounded by a hot, clumpy and dense magnetized medium (Carilli et al. 1997). On the basis of these arguments we targetted 1138-262 for a cluster search using narrow band imaging and multi object spectroscopy. These observations resulted in the discovery of a structure

TABLE 1
OBSERVATION LOG

Technique	Date	Config	Time (hour)
Optical Imaging	April 1999	Bessel B OII/3814	0.5 4.0
Optical Spectroscopy	March 2000	Mask A Mask B	5.5 6.0
Infrared Imaging	March 1999	K_s 2.07μ	1.5 6.0

of 14 $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emitting galaxies in the region of this radio galaxy (Pentericci et al. 2000). Here we present additional results from these observations that shed light on the origin of the emission line gas, the ionization processes and the constituents of the presumably young galaxy.

2. OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

Using optical broad and narrow band images, obtained at the 8.2m ESO VLT¹ Antu telescope with FORS1, we found 50 objects that were candidates for galaxies with large $\text{Ly}\alpha$ equivalent width at $z = 2.16$ (Kurk et al. 2000). Multi object spectroscopy with the same instrument gave redshifts for 15 candidates (Pentericci et al. 2000). We have also obtained infrared broad and narrow band images with ISAAC at the Antu telescope to search for $\text{H}\alpha$ emitting companions of the radio galaxy. Table 1 summarizes the dates and integration times of these observations. The optical and infrared observations are also very suitable to study MRC 1138-262 itself: from the optical imaging we have obtained a detailed map of the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ halo, from the spectroscopy deep spectra of several components of the galaxy and from the infrared imaging a map of the $\text{H}\alpha$ halo.

2.1. Optical imaging

Image reduction resulted in $6''.8 \times 6''.8$ narrow and broad band images with seeing $0''.9$ and 1σ limiting AB magnitude per square arcsecond of 27.8 and 28.1 respectively.

The B band image (see greyscale in Fig. 1) shows that MRC 1138-262 has a very clumpy morphology, quite unlike modern-day massive ellipticals. Instead, there are 7 separate barely resolved knots in a $15'' \times 10''$ region, some aligned with the direction of the radio jet axis. In Fig. 1 these components are

¹This research is based on observations carried out at the European Southern Observatory, Paranal, Chile.

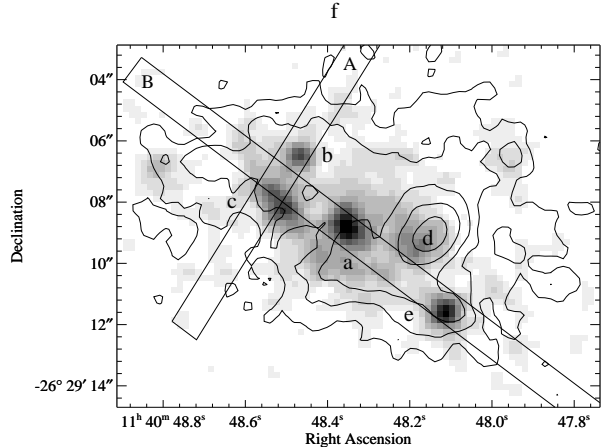


Fig. 1. B band image of 1138-262 (greyscale) overlaid with contours of $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission. Also shown are the locations of two slits used for spectroscopy, labeled with upper case letters. Lower case letters label the various parts of the radio galaxy, as in Pentericci et al. (1997).

labeled by lowercase letters. Component *a* is identified with the nucleus, hosting the AGN of the radio galaxy.

We have obtained a $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission image of the radio galaxy from the difference between the narrow and the broad band image. The $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission map (contours in Fig. 1) strikingly shows the enormous size of the halo encompassing all the continuum clumps. Most continuum clumps have a counterpart in the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ map, but the peak of the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission does not coincide with the most luminous continuum source (*a*), but with a much fainter one (*d*).

2.2. Infrared imaging

The reduced $2''.5 \times 2''.5$ narrow and broad band images have an average seeing of $0''.5$ and 1σ limiting AB magnitude per square arcsecond of 23.9 and 24.0 respectively.

Contrary to the B band image, the K_s band image shows one main bright unresolved component, accompanied by two small clumps in the North East direction. This structure coincides with the nucleus and components *b* and *c* in the optical image.

From the narrow and broad band images we have constructed an $\text{H}\alpha$ emission image in the same way as the optical $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission image. The $\text{H}\alpha$ morphology is very different from the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ morphology. The $\text{H}\alpha$ emission is dominated by the bright unresolved nucleus. It has a westward extension of about $5''$, which we associate with component *d*. There are three more faint $\text{H}\alpha$ emission regions, of which two are coinciding with a local enhancement of $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission.

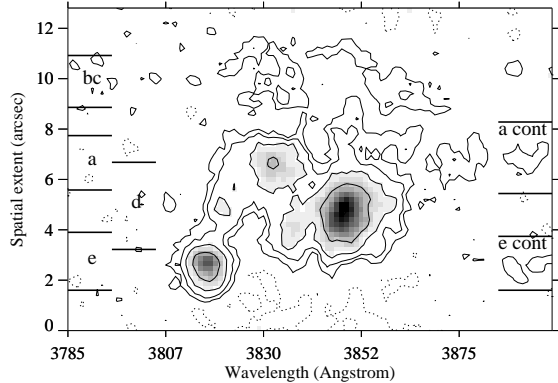


Fig. 2. Contour plot of the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ region of the slit in mask B. Aperture limits are indicated by thick straight lines for the individual components denoted by their names inside the apertures.

2.3. Optical spectroscopy

We used several FORS1 masks to observe the candidate $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emitters near MRC 1138-262 and in two masks we employed one central slit to observe several clumps of the radio galaxy. The positions of these central slits are shown in Fig. 1. The spectra cover a wavelength range from approximately 3180 to 5550 Å and the 1'' slitwidths gave a resolution of ~ 5 Å corresponding to about 400 km s^{-1} . The slits in mask A and B each cover at least three components in the halo of the radio galaxy. Fig. 2 shows the complex intertwined two-dimensional spectrum of the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ lines from the components in the slit of mask B. All components observed show $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission, but components *a* and *b* also have continuum emission with interstellar absorption lines. Components *c* and *e* do show a continuum but no absorption lines are detected, despite the good s/n. Component *a* (see Fig. 3 for its one-dimensional spectrum) is the only one possessing metal emission lines.

3. DISCUSSION

The fact that $\text{Ly}\alpha$ and $\text{H}\alpha$ emission are radiated by the same source but transported in a different way – $\text{Ly}\alpha$ is a resonant line, while $\text{H}\alpha$ is not – gives us the opportunity to study the combined presence of neutral hydrogen as a scattering medium and dust as an absorbing medium. In most astrophysical cases where hydrogen is photo-ionized, the transition from $n=2$ to 1 is believed to be optically thick (Case B recombination, Osterbrock 1989). This dictates a $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratio in the range of 8 to 12 depending on temperature and density of the gas. The $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratio we detect in the halo of MRC 1138-262 varies with position, but is always smaller than 8 (see Fig. 5).

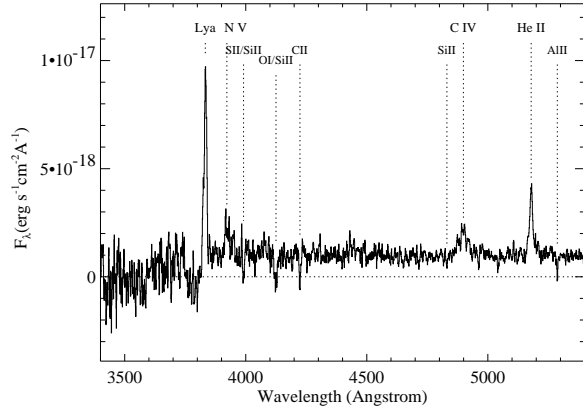


Fig. 3. Spectrum of component *a* in mask B. Emission lines are indicated. The continuum shows several interstellar absorption lines.

It is striking that there is only weak $\text{Ly}\alpha$ present at the position of the strongest $\text{H}\alpha$ clump with an observed $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratio of ~ 0.015 . The presence of strong continuum emission here suggests ionization by UV radiation from hot stars or alternatively from the nearby AGN. The $\text{Ly}\alpha$ photons are resonantly scattered by large amounts of neutral hydrogen and possibly absorbed by dust, while the $\text{H}\alpha$ photons are relatively unaffected by these two processes.

The second region of interest is the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ peak, which is situated at the position where the radio jet has been bent, as shown in Fig. 4. We propose as the likeliest explanation that the radio jet encounters a relatively dense medium at this location. Propagation through the dense clump changes the jet direction while driving shocks into the medium thereby ionizing hydrogen gas. This behaviour is reminiscent of that in 3C277.3 (van Breugel et al. 1985) where the radio jet is observed to bend at the position of highest ionization gas clump. The $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratio in this region is on average about 4 and at its peak at a value of 7.6, close to the expected value for Case B recombination. Since this is far from any continuum clump, it is not surprising that less neutral hydrogen and/or dust is present.

Apart from three smaller regions with mean $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratios of 0.6, $\text{H}\alpha$ is not detected anywhere else within the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ structure, leading to lower limit $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratios from 0.1 to 2.0. A significant part of the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission in these regions is probably scattered emission and no $\text{H}\alpha$ is expected here. The $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratio of all emission measured is 2.0. A correction for galactic extinction raises this ratio by about 15%. McCarthy et al. (1992) determined $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratios for two radio galaxies at $z = 2.4$ by

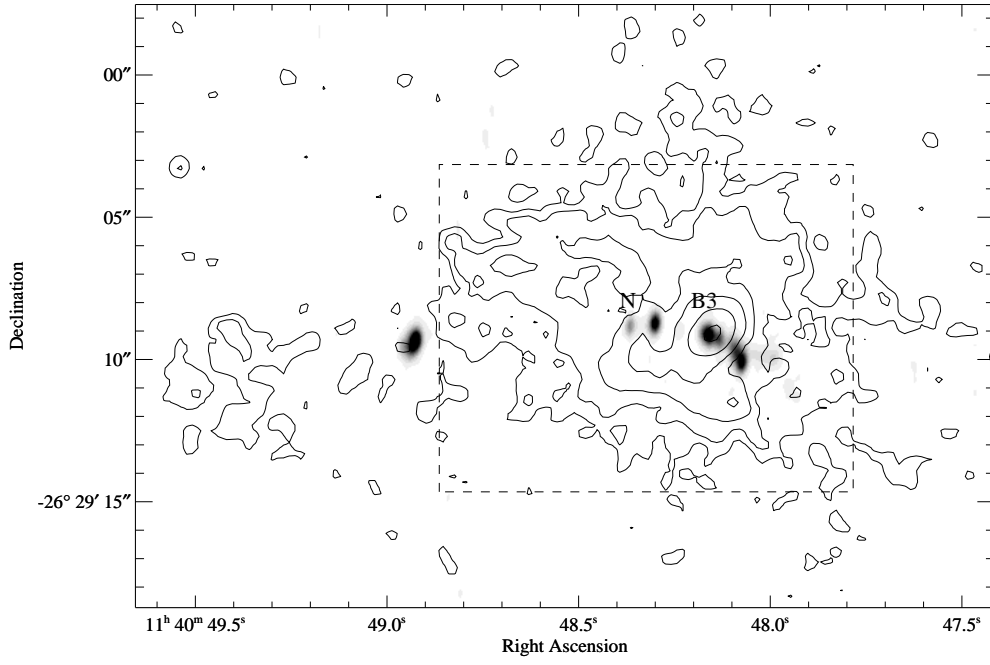


Fig. 4. Contour plot of the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission with radio continuum emission at 8.1 GHz superimposed in greyscale. Contours are a geometric progression in steps of 2, starting from 2 times the background rms noise. The nucleus (N) and the radio knot where the jet bends (B3) are indicated, following Pentericci et al. (1997). The rectangle is enlarged in Fig. 5.

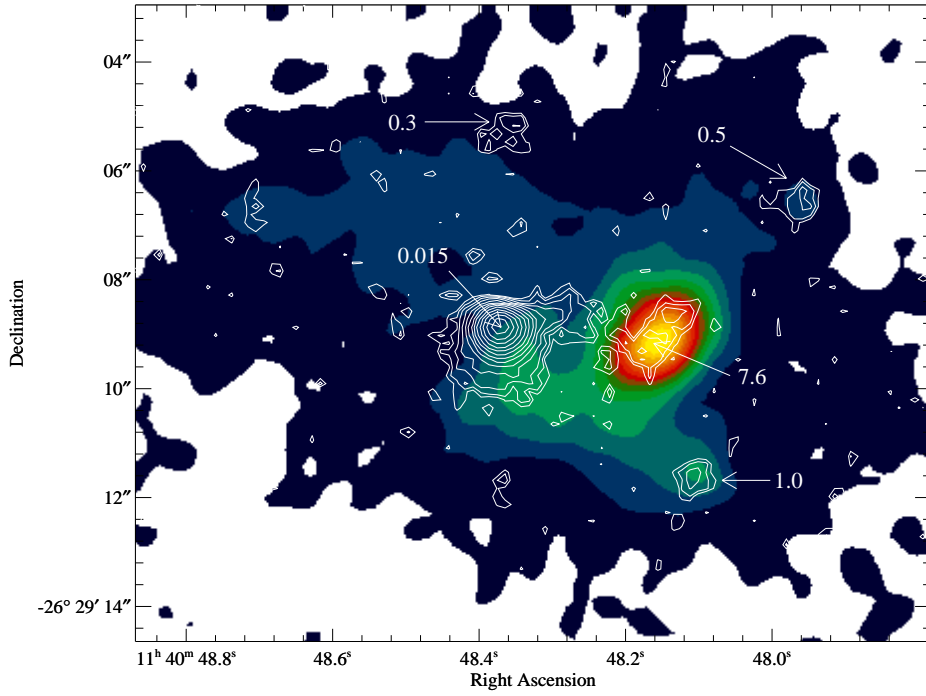


Fig. 5. Close-up of the boxed region in Fig. 4. The $\text{H}\alpha$ emission is represented by contours, which are geometrically progressing in steps of $2^{\frac{1}{2}}$, starting from 2 times the background rms noise. The underlying greyscale represents the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission. $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratios are indicated: the minimum of 0.015 at the nucleus and the maximum of 7.6 at the location of the bend in the radio jet, average values of 0.3, 0.5 and 1.0 for three presumed starburst regions.

spectroscopy and they find extinction corrected values of 4.7 and 3.5, slightly higher than our value of 2.3. We conclude that, although the $\text{Ly}\alpha/\text{H}\alpha$ ratio in the powerful radio galaxy MRC 1138-262 has extremely low values in one place due to scattering and very high values in another due to the absence of a scattering medium, the average ratio is still a factor ~ 3 below the recombination value, implying that at least some dust is present.

The nucleus is the sole component observed which exhibits the metal emission lines N V, C IV and He II. Using the ratios of these lines as metallicity indicator (Vernet et al. 2000), we derive that this clump's metallicity is three times solar. From the absence of detectable metal emission lines in other clumps with strong $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission, we surmise that there are differences in metallicity among the clumps, consistent with the metallicity gradient measured in MRC 2104-242 (Overzier et al. in these proceedings).

The spectra of two continuum components show absorption lines due to interstellar metal elements. The absorption lines in the central clump are redshifted with respect to the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ line by $\sim 1100 \text{ km s}^{-1}$. This is different from what is observed in the HzRG 4C41.17, where the absorption is blueshifted with respect to the emission (Dey et al. 1997). The equivalent widths of these lines are comparable with the lines in the restframe UV spectrum of MS 1512-cB58 (Pettini et al. 2000) and an average spectrum of 11 high-redshift galaxies in the Hubble Deep Field (Lowenthal et al. 1997).

4. CONCLUSION

Observations of the giant ionized gaseous halo which encompasses the continuum clumps of 1138-262 suggest that hydrogen in this system is ionized by two main sources. In the nucleus, the UV radiation originates either in the AGN itself or in massive young stars. Near the bend in the string of radio emission knots, shocks in the ambient medium caused by the radio jet can explain the origin of the ionizing radiation. Apart from small starburst regions which emit some $\text{H}\alpha$ further away from the nucleus, $\text{H}\alpha$ is not detected in the large $\text{Ly}\alpha$ halo. We conclude that the $\text{Ly}\alpha$ emission observed far from any continuum sources is scattered radiation and that there is dust present in the radio galaxy which absorbs some of the scattered $\text{Ly}\alpha$ photons.

The high metallicity derived from the emission line ratios in the spectrum of the nucleus supports this conclusion.

The characteristics of the interstellar absorption lines found in two continuum components are similar to the absorption lines measured in the restframe UV spectra of Lyman-break galaxies (LBGs). We propose, therefore, that the components in the halo of 1138-262 are small galaxies in various stages of evolution, some resembling LBGs, which are falling in into the potential well of this system. Such a scenario would agree with the simulations of hierarchical formation models for massive galaxies (e.g. White et al. 1991). Extrapolating on the basis of these models from $z = 2.2$ to the present, 1138-262 would be transformed into a tranquil but bright elliptical galaxy surrounded by its cluster companions.

The new images and spectra obtained with the VLT show that the complex system of stars, gas and ionizing radiation, which we call MRC 1138-262, contains significant amounts of neutral hydrogen gas, but has also stellar components with properties similar to that of LBGs. This is further evidence that MRC 1138-262 at $z = 2.16$ is a galaxy in the process of formation by hierarchical merging of LBGs.

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